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ABSTRACT

This document presents the results of a review of the District of Columbia Public Schools' (DCPS) efforts to repair school roofs during the summer of 1997. The statement details when funds were made available to pay for roof repairs, the costs of the roof repairs, and additional roofs to be fixed in fiscal year 1998 and beyond. Sufficient funding ($38 million) to begin roof work became available in 1997 and repairs were initiated that summer. A review of construction shows that the DCPS spent $37 million for roof repair in fiscal 1997. The cost included an extensive amount of work to ensure that facilities were structurally sound and watertight. Considering the costs for all the work involved, the average per spare foot cost was about $20. Contracts managed by the General Services Administration averaged $13 per square foot, whereas contracts overseen by the DCPS cost around $22 per square foot. Much of the cost was caused by extensive repairs that were required at particular schools. For fiscal year 1998, the DCPS Capital Improvement Program budget shows that about $35 million will be spent on 40 school-roof projects. (RJM)

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Testimony

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Availability of Funds and the Cost of FY 1997 Roof Projects

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EF 605 042

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to be here today to discuss the results of our review of the District of Columbia Public Schools' (DCPS) efforts to repair school roofs during the summer of 1997. You indicated that your Subcommittee had received widely varying information on the cost of the roof repair work ranging from $11 to $19 per square foot, and that there were divergent views on when funds were available to do that work, ranging from as early as April 1997 to July 1997. Consistent with your request, we focused on when funds were available to pay for the roof work and the cost, including the cost per square foot, of the work completed in fiscal year 1997. These issues are discussed in greater detail in our report, which is being issued today to the Subcommittee.[1]

My statement today covers three points:

- when funds were made available to pay for roof repairs;
- the cost of the roof repairs, including the cost per square foot; and
- additional roofs to be repaired in fiscal year 1998 and beyond.

Background

Roof repairs were done at 61 D.C. schools during fiscal year 1997. The General Services Administration (GSA) managed the work at 10 schools and DCPS at 51 schools. The majority of District public schools were built over 50 years ago, generally have not been well maintained, and, consequently, substantial deferred maintenance existed. In addition, concerns about safety and problems with leaky school roofs have been widely reported. We and others have documented the less-than-adequate condition of the District's public schools in several reports.[2]

Availability of Funds

Sufficient funding was available to begin roof work when schools were closed for the summer on June 20, 1997. Bond proceeds of $11.5 million that became available in October 1996 were being used to fund the GSA-managed work. Additional funds later became available for the

[1]District of Columbia Public Schools: Availability of Funds and the Cost of the FY 1997 Roof Projects (GAO/AIMD-98-82, March 9, 1998).

[2]School Facilities: Condition of America's Schools (GAO/HEHS-95-61, Feb. 1, 1995); School Facilities: America's Schools Report Differing Conditions (GAO/HEHS-96-103, June 14, 1996); School Facilities: Profiles of School Condition by State (GAO/HEHS-96-148, June 24, 1996); District of Columbia Draft Emergency Supplemental Funding Request for District of Columbia Public Schools (GAO/HEHS-97-116R, May 5, 1997); and GSA's study, Determination and Prioritization of the District of Columbia: Public Schools Projects (February 18, 1997).

DCPS-managed work: $18 million in March 1997 and an additional $20 million in June 1997. Thus, when D.C. schools closed for the summer, at least $38 million was available for DCPS-managed roof repairs.

Although these funds were available when schools closed, the DCPS-managed roof work was delayed to the third week of July. DCPS was not prepared to start making repairs immediately because it had not completed sufficient initial work, such as determining the scope of work on individual projects that forms the basis for seeking bids. One reason for DCPS not being prepared to start work was the almost complete turnover in technical capital project staff during the school year. Also, work was delayed because of difficulties in securing bids. DCPS told us that at the time the long-range plan was submitted in February 1997, it expected to complete roof work by the end of October 1997 but accelerated it in response to a court order that roof work not be done while classes were in session. Consequently, the work was accomplished under a highly compressed schedule.

Cost of Repairs

Our review showed that DCPS spent about $37 million for roof replacement/repair in fiscal year 1997. This cost included an extensive amount of work to ensure that facilities were structurally sound and watertight. A significant, but not determinable, amount of these costs was attributable to factors other than what would be strictly interpreted as roof replacement/repair work. Among these were structural integrity, fire damage, the general deterioration from deferred maintenance, and warranty stipulations. Extensive work was performed to repair and replace masonry, cornices, flashing, and coping and to clean drains. As a result, the costs were higher than what would have been incurred for roofing work only.

DCPS had initially budgeted $22 million for roof work, which according to DCPS officials, did not address the complexity of the roof areas and other issues. Subsequently, based on the detailed evaluations done at the individual schools as a basis for contracting for work during fiscal year 1997, the aggregate cost estimates—which we understood considered the relevant factors—was $31.7 million. The contracts for work at 54 of the 61 schools totaled about $32.7 million. Work on the remaining seven schools was done primarily by DCPS in-house maintenance staff. As of February 4, 1998, DCPS had provided us with change orders totaling about $2 million for the 54 schools, which brings the total repair costs reported to date to

about $34.7 million. In addition, DCPS incurred about $2 million for consulting, contract administration, and construction management fees.

Considering the costs for all the work involved, the average per square foot cost was about $20. For GSA-managed contracts, the average cost per square foot was about $13 whereas, for DCPS-managed contracts, the average cost per square foot was about $22. DCPS officials attributed the higher square-foot costs of their contracts to extensive roof-related work that was required to achieve sound facilities. Also, GSA issued task orders against its existing contracts and did not have to seek bids when the market was saturated with roof work, its projects were done over longer time frames and required less overtime pay, and its contracts covered only flat roof work whereas DCPS contracts covered multiple roof areas and materials, which are costlier.

The individual schools worked on by DCPS contractors had square foot costs ranging from $4.19 for Ketcham Elementary to $77.27 for Cook Elementary. The square foot cost for GSA-contracted work ranged from $10.10 for Shadd Elementary to $27.43 for Spingarn Gym. According to GSA, it encountered unusual conditions at Spingarn Gym because of fire damage, the installation of a new roof deck and supporting structures, and a significant amount of asbestos removed.

DCPS officials indicated that the wide range in per square-foot costs among schools resulted primarily from roof-related work. For example, less than 20 percent of Cook Elementary's total cost was related to roof replacement. Most of the cost was related to the repair of an ornamental cornice just below the roof level. The cornice had deteriorated, and portions of it were at risk of falling off; therefore, Cook was considered a major safety concern. In addition, the cornice had to be repaired from a crane. Further, DCPS officials stated that much work was done to repair the skylight and to repair coping with new stainless steel covering.

For MacFarland Junior High ($64.45), DCPS officials and engineering consultants stated that large amounts of masonry repair (repointing and replacement of broken brick), installation of metal panels on high parapet walls, and skylight repair were performed. In addition, the flashing was repaired, the stone coping was replaced, and drains were cleaned.

Insufficient data exist to ascertain with any certainty the added cost associated with the degree of deferred maintenance encountered in this extensive project. Years of neglect and inadequate repair and maintenance

practices all served to increase costs over what could be expected in well managed, adequately financed entities. Material suppliers would not provide or honor extended warranties unless prescribed roof-related and other preventive maintenance was completed concurrently with the roofing repairs or replacement. According to GSA, DCPS, and the architectural and engineering firm overseeing the work, these factors precluded a more economical solution to the school roofing project.

Future Roof Work

For fiscal year 1998, the DCPS Capital Improvement Program budget indicates that about $35 million will be spent on 40 school-roof projects. DCPS has about $41.8 million to get an early start on these projects. DCPS has engaged an engineering consultant to (1) identify the scope of work and (2) develop cost estimates. DCPS informed us that as of November 3, 1997, they completed roof repair work on five schools for which the scope of work and cost estimates had been completed in fiscal year 1997. DCPS officials anticipate that roof repair work at the remaining 35 schools will begin in the spring and will be completed during the 1998 summer recess. DCPS told us that as of February 27, 1998, the engineering consultant had inspected 26 of the remaining 35 school roofs and developed scope of work and cost estimates. According to DCPS officials, scope of work and cost estimates for the remaining 9 schools will be prepared some time in May 1998.

Currently, DCPS has 45 closed schools, which it intends to sell or lease. DCPS officials stated that they intend to use the proceeds from those schools to help finance fiscal year 1998 and later school projects. An additional $63 million for school roof repair or replacement is included in the DCPS Proposed Capital Improvement Program Plan for Fiscal Years 1999 to 2004.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I will be happy to answer any questions that you or members of the Subcommittee may have.

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